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GPT/Custer Spur EIS
c/o CH2M Hill
1100 112th Avenue NE, Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 09004
comments@eisgatewaypacificwa.gov

Re: Proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal Project

Dear Responsible Official:

Please accept this letter/email as a citizen comment on the scope of the EIS to be required for the Gateway Pacific Terminal Project for the transport of American coal to markets in the Far East. I live in the community of Bow/Blanchard in Washington State, a community that has lived in balance with the railroad since the early 1900s. My house was part of the historic utopian colony created at the turn of the century and is recorded as being constructed in 1901 although it was probably at its present location earlier. The use of coal trains has already created a risk of significant adverse environmental impacts but the expansion of the terminal would allow much larger numbers of such trains, thus dramatically increasing the risk. Based in my personal experience with the initial coal trains, I request study of three areas of significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the construction and expansion of the Gateway Pacific Terminal Project.

Impacts on Structures. First, as I noted at the outset, my house has been in its present location since at least 1901. I have lived here since 1994. In 2003, I had a structural engineer inspect my house to determine if the house was structurally sound, particularly in light of the nearby train traffic. His conclusion was that all the settling had long since occurred and that there was no need to be concerned. My experience of the train impact on the house was that the horn was noisy but the train did not appreciable shake the house, so I addressed the horn noise in home improvements. However, that situation changed radically with the advent of the coal trains.

While the railroad made no attempt to discuss the new traffic with its neighbors, it was evident that there was change afoot because of track improvement work all along my property. This apparently was necessary to handle the enormous increase in train weight and length. These impacts were confirmed with the arrival of the coal trains. Where my house had not shaken before, now it shakes and creaks when the train goes by and for some time afterwards due to shock waves created by the long, heavy train.

The proposed terminal expansion to handle as many as 18 coal trains a day would logically lead to greatly enhanced coal train traffic. I request that the EIS study the impact of this dramatically increased environmental hazard on structures located along the tracks, especially homes that have lived in harmony with the trains for decades. Before approving a permit for such an expansion, policy-makers need to consider the impact on the citizenry that lives and works in communities adjacent to the railroad tracks.

Impact on Salmon-Bearing Streams. Across the tracks from my house is Colony Creek. Colony Creek is a salmon-bearing stream and returning salmon making their way up the creek are readily observable in our neighborhood. The train tracks are not 100 feet from Colony Creek. I would request that the EIS study the impact on salmon-bearing streams such as Colony Creek and the disturbance of salmon habitat by both the physical impact of the traveling coal trains as well as the risk of contamination from diesel and coal carried by those trains. I also believe the permitting jurisdictions should have information to aid them in considering how the Endangered Species Act would apply to a jurisdiction that issued a permit creating such risks of a “take” as part of their assessment of the environmental impacts.

Impact on Livestock. As the owner of a small farm making value-added dairy products, I am concerned about the impacts of the enhanced coal train traffic on my livestock. Small farms such as mine are an increasingly important source of locally raised, healthy foods for consumers. The EIS should include analysis of whether enhanced train traffic poses a health risk to livestock and in turn to consumers. The extent to which noise, fumes, and coal dust endanger their breathing and other health considerations should be part of the EIS analysis of significant adverse environmental impacts. Further, the impact on production by those animals should also be considered, in terms of the food chain and agricultural productivity.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIS. If I may be of assistance in clarifying these comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Margery Hite

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